

ROBERT J. COUSER

## **Burckhard's North Side Bakery of Aberdeen**

### **A Community Staple for Four Generations**

Aberdeen, South Dakota, like many communities, has a rich history of family-run businesses that have prospered over several generations. These local establishments include automobile dealerships, grocery stores, construction companies, restaurants, farming and livestock ventures, and wholesale drug companies, to mention a few. Burckhard's North Side Bakery was one of the city's most successful and noteworthy family-run operations, spanning four generations and eighty-seven years. Envisaged by Paul and Catherine Burckhard at the turn of the twentieth century and opened for business in 1906, the bakery and its history reveal how immigrant families influenced Aberdeen's development and how changing trends have tested the endurance of local businesses.

Aberdeen's establishment and early growth occurred amid the surge of settlement called the Great Dakota Boom of 1878–1887. The prospect of affordable land—made widely available after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act on 20 May 1862—initially brought a wave of non-Indian settlers to the southeastern corner of Dakota Territory. Conflict with the region's Indian tribes, years of severe drought, and a sharp economic downturn, however, slowed expansion into the rest of the territory. By the late 1870s, an improved financial outlook, favorable weather, and new treaties with the Lakota, or western Sioux, Indians led railroad companies to expand lines that had stalled in Iowa and Minnesota. The arrival of the railroads during

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the 1880s would help to make Aberdeen the “Hub City” for goods and services in northeastern South Dakota.<sup>1</sup>

On 3 January 1881, Charles Prior, superintendent of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, platted a new rail center in eastern Dakota Territory. Prior named the settlement after Aberdeen, Scotland, the hometown of his superior, Alexander Mitchell. Prior's initial plat of Aberdeen consisted of an area measuring four blocks by four blocks, bounded today by Railroad Avenue on the north, Fourth Avenue on the south, First Street on the west, and Washington Street on the east. The first train arrived in Aberdeen on 6 July 1881, and the town remained the railroad's westernmost point until 1883. Railroads delivered the raw materials to build Aberdeen's homes and businesses, with those on Main Street south of the tracks being established first due to the town's initial layout.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Brown County's population grew rapidly, from 353 in 1880 to 12,241 in 1885. Many of these new residents settled in Aberdeen. By July 1882, a little over one year after the town's founding, its population had risen to one thousand. Shortly after South Dakota became a state in 1889, the city counted 3,182 residents, a number that would swell to 7,177 by 1903. By that point, railroad boosters had branded Aberdeen “the hub city of the Dakotas,” both for its potential as a center of commerce and a popular 1886 illustration that depicted Aberdeen as the hub of a wheel with the nine rail lines set to pass through town as spokes. Aberdeen surpassed its early rival Columbia to become the seat of Brown County in 1890, and soon a lively business district developed on South Main Street.<sup>3</sup>

1. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 12 (1862): 392; Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 79, 170–74; *A Souvenir of Aberdeen: The Railroad Hub of the Dakotas* (1907; new ed., Aberdeen, S.Dak.: Aberdeen/Brown County Landmark Commission, 1992), p. viii.

2. *Early History of Brown County, South Dakota* (Aberdeen, S.Dak.: Brown County Territorial Pioneer Committee, 1965), pp. 36–38.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 37; Don Artz, *The Town in the Frog Pond: Stories of Builders, Buildings and Business in Aberdeen's Commercial Historic District* (Aberdeen, S.Dak.: Memories, Inc., 1991), pp. 6–8. At present, the six blocks on Main Street located south of Railroad Avenue form a historic district.

Many of the newcomers to Aberdeen during its first decade came from Iowa, Minnesota, and the northeastern United States, bringing with them American culture and education. The town's rapid growth in the early 1890s, however, owed to an influx of immigrants from eastern Europe and Scandinavia, including the Burckhard family. The Burckhards hailed from Strassburg, a small German colony in what was then southwestern Russia, known today as Kuchurhan, Ukraine. Founded in 1808, Strassburg was one of hundreds of German agricultural settlements established in the wake of a 1763 manifesto issued by Catherine II that invited foreign settlers to Russia. Intended to populate and develop the area surrounding the southern Volga River, the manifesto promised settlers free land, freedom to exercise their religion, minimal taxation, and exemption from military service. Alexander I extended this invitation to include the Ukrainian lands north of the Black Sea in 1803.<sup>4</sup>

German immigrants weary from religious persecution, overtaxation, and forced military service soon poured into the area, forming settlements along sectarian lines. Strassburg, for instance, was predominantly Catholic. The immigrants maintained the customs and dialects of their homeland, opening schools and churches with minimal interference from Russian officials until 1871. That year, Alexander II, fearful of internal uprisings and seeking to stoke nationalist sentiment, demanded that all minority groups conform to Russian norms. If German settlers refused this order, the government would revoke their privileges.<sup>5</sup>

Amidst great unrest and suffering, many of the German settlers chose to immigrate to the United States and Canada. Those who made this journey joined an unprecedented surge in emigration from southern and eastern Europe during the late nineteenth century. While most of these newcomers sought work in the nation's burgeoning industrial cities, the promise of cheap land lured others further west. Many Germans from Russia looked to settle in agricultural areas throughout the Midwest and the Great Plains, which they believed resembled the flat

4. Michael M. Miller, comp., *Researching the Germans from Russia* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1987), pp. xvii–xx.

5. Ibid.

plains of the Russian steppes. The earliest German-Russian immigrants arrived in Dakota Territory in 1873 and settled in its southeastern corner, near the territorial capital of Yankton. Territorial officials had encouraged this immigration in hopes of boosting the population.<sup>6</sup>

In 1893, Paul and Katherine Burckhard, who married in Strassburg in 1878, joined other Germans from Russia in what by then had become the state of South Dakota. Paul Burckhard was born in Germany around 1854 and raised by his grandfather, a schoolteacher, and grandmother, a governess. It is unclear when the family moved to Strassburg. Katherine Miltenberger Burckhard, also known as Katie, was born around 1856 in Russia, as were both of her parents. Paul and Katherine's children, Egnaz, age fourteen, Philippina, age eleven, Peter, age five, and Barbara, age two, accompanied them to America. The Burckhards arrived in New York City on 14 April 1893 aboard the steamship

6. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 116–18. Many of the earliest German-Russian immigrants to South Dakota were Hutterites and Mennonites.



Paul and Katherine Burckhard posed with their children for this photograph in 1898, shortly after they moved to Aberdeen.

SS *Labn* after departing from Bremen, Germany.<sup>7</sup> At some point after their arrival in the states, the family's surname changed from Burkhart to Burckhard. The reason for this change and the specific factors that inspired their move are unknown.

The Burckhards first settled in Leola, located northwest of Aberdeen in McPherson County, where they likely had family who had previously migrated. Both McPherson and its southern neighbor, Edmunds County, took in significant numbers of the Catholic German-Russian immigrants who surged into the territory following the railroad's arrival. Edmunds County was even home to a settlement called New Strasburg, just northeast of Ipswich. Immigrants from the same village also established Strasburg, North Dakota, not far north of the state line.<sup>8</sup> In 1897, the family moved to Aberdeen and bought the house at 119 North Main Street. Two years later, they purchased the adjoining lot at 117 North Main Street. By that point, a sizable community of Germans from Russia called the city's north side home.<sup>9</sup>

While it is not clear whether any Burckhards had worked in bakeries before emigrating to South Dakota, they seem to have possessed a strong interest in the trade. Around 1903, Paul and Katherine sent their teenaged son Peter to work for the Ward-Owsley Company, a bakery and candy manufacturer regarded as one of Aberdeen's most successful businesses during the first decades of the twentieth century. The bakery began in the 1890s as part of the restaurant in the Ward Hotel, named for its owners Alonzo J. Ward, Sr., and Beecher Ward. The bakery soon expanded and moved to a new building. In 1903, Alonzo Ward asked William Owsley to join the management team, after which point the enterprise became known as the Ward-Owsley Company. The company soon became renowned throughout the region for its baked goods and sweets. Ward-Owsley used a fleet of delivery trucks

7. "Passenger Lists," *Heritage Review* 22 (Dec. 1978): 47–48.

8. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 169; John P. Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements and Social Organization in South Dakota*, South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin no. 313 (Brookings: South Dakota State College, 1937), p. 43. Strasburg, North Dakota, is the hometown of famed "champagne music" artist and television host Lawrence Welk, also a descendant of immigrants from Strassburg, Russia.

9. Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, *A South Dakota Guide* (1938; new ed., Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2005), pp. 97–98.

to supply area grocery stores with its Golden Crust Bread and was the first bakery in Aberdeen to deliver bread in waxed wrappers, a practice that eventually became standard due to sanitary concerns. The company ground its own powdered sugar, supplied chocolate mints to railroad companies, and sold Chalet Caramels to stores as far away as Spokane, Washington, and Indianapolis, Indiana, before closing in the 1930s.<sup>10</sup>

During his time at Ward-Owsley, Peter Burckhard, also known as P. J., learned the fundamentals of baking and making candy. The North Side Bakery, meanwhile, was in its infancy. Though at least one article about the family business suggests that Katherine started the bakery in 1902, intending to pass it on to Peter, most accounts have the bakery opening in 1906. That year, Paul and Katherine hired Henry A. Schachte, a former railroad man who had built Saint Mary's Parish Church as well as several notable homes and businesses on Aberdeen's north side, to construct a building made of cement blocks and stones on the lot at 117 North Main Street, the bakery's location for the next eighty-seven years.<sup>11</sup> On 7 November 1908, the *Aberdeen Daily*

10. For examples of Ward-Owsley's early success and growth, see *Aberdeen Daily News*, 5 June 1918; *Aberdeen American News*, 3 Apr. 1927; and *Aberdeen Morning American*, 19 Aug. 1930. See also *Brown County History* (Aberdeen, S. Dak.: Brown County Museum and Historical Society, 1980), p. 298.

11. *Aberdeen Evening News*, 20 Dec. 1934. The ownership history of the bakery can be



Aberdeen's Ward-Owsley Company sold its confections throughout the region in elegant boxes and tins like these.



*News* reported that Peter had “bought” the bakery, noting, “He has been in the employ of the Ward Bros. bakery for a number of years and no doubt will do well in his new undertaking.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, property records indicate that Paul owned the building, meaning Peter likely managed the business. In March 1909, the *Aberdeen Democrat*, which described the bakery as “a very successful venture,” reported that Paul Burckhard had ordered the construction of a new two-story building, which still stands at 117 North Main Street.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of when the bakery opened or who technically owned it, the business was a family affair from the outset.

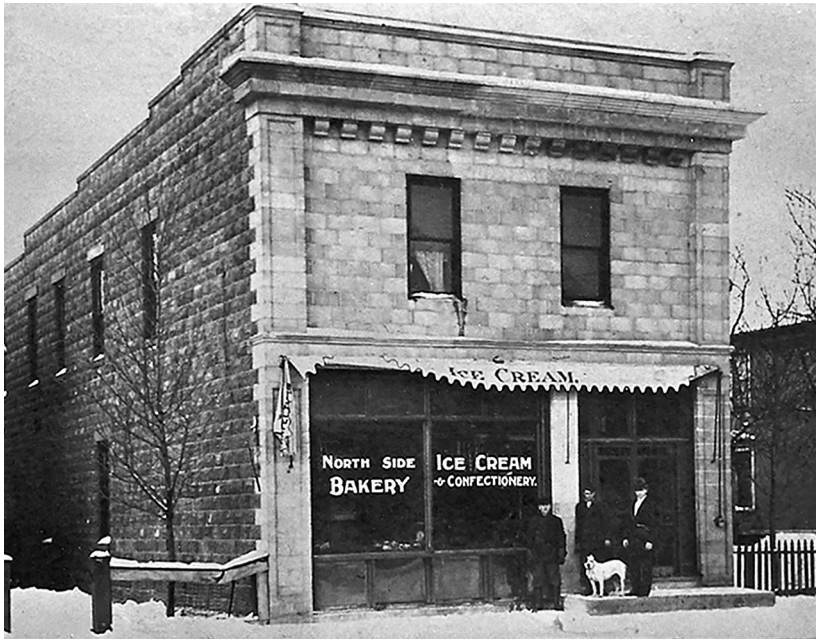
By the summer of 1909, a slew of advertisements for Burckhard’s North Side Bakery began appearing in local newspapers. Advertise-

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traced through various deeds recorded in the office of the Brown County Register of Deeds in Aberdeen.

12. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 7 Nov. 1908.

13. *Aberdeen Democrat*, 26 Mar. 1909.



This view taken around 1920 shows the North Side Bakery, along with three unidentified people, at its longtime location of 117 North Main Street.

ments and news items typically identified Peter as the proprietor, though family histories suggest that Katherine also ran the business during these years. The extent of Paul Burckhard's involvement in the bakery's day-to-day operations is unclear, but he may have been in ill health, as he died unexpectedly at his home on 6 March 1910. The *Aberdeen Daily News* described him as "one of the well known residents of the city, . . . prominent especially in the activities of the north side, which section he had aided in building up substantially."<sup>14</sup>

In the early years, Burckhard's North Side Bakery competed with larger enterprises like Ward-Owsley and the McDiarmid and Slater Store. The first floor of Burckhard's North Side Bakery accommodated a retail bakery with a confectionery store in front and the bakery equipment and production line in the back. The building's second floor had ten sleeping rooms, often rented by traveling railroad men, and one bathroom. Later, the family converted the rooms into three small apartments. By the time the bakery opened, the north side of Aberdeen, still known for its sizable population of Germans from Russia, had developed a robust shopping district, including a grocery store, hardware store, saloon, butcher shop, barber shop, livery stable, and hotel. From its inception, the North Side Bakery was a cornerstone of the community and a popular neighborhood gathering place, especially for those who hailed from the old country.<sup>15</sup>

While the community embraced the North Side Bakery, its success was not guaranteed. Small bakeries like Burckhard's had to convince locals to buy bread and baked goods rather than make them. As recently as 1890, women working at home produced 90 percent of the nation's bread. As the urban population grew and more women began seeking outside employment, buying bread became a common practice. A marked increase in bread sales led some observers to declare the period from 1900 to 1930 the "Golden Era" of bakeries in America.<sup>16</sup> Still, small bakeries had to compete with the large industrial opera-

14. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 7 Mar. 1910.

15. *Aberdeen American News*, 17 June 1956; Federal Writers' Project, *South Dakota Guide*, p. 97; *Brown County History*, pp. 302–303.

16. William G. Panschar, *Baking in America*, vol. 1, *Economic Development* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1956), pp. 110–11.



tions that began proliferating thanks to developments in technology and transportation. By the early twentieth century, moreover, awareness of food safety spurred concern over how small shops prepared baked goods. Many assumed that food produced in industrial facilities, where machines did much of the work, was more hygienic than that made in smaller bakeries, where employees used traditional methods and worked with their hands.<sup>17</sup> Burckhard's emphasized cleanliness in their advertisements to fight this stigma. As one of their 1909 ads put it, "All intelligent people want food that is pure and wholesome and we know that if you will inspect our bakery . . . you will become one of our regular patrons."<sup>18</sup>

The North Side Bakery's practices nonetheless stood in stark contrast to those of the high-capacity industrial bakeries that produced an increasingly large share of the nation's bread. In the beginning, the Burckhards used maple cases to store bread and bakery products. The family baked in an open-hearth oven located in the back portion of the first floor, using long-handled wooden peels to move goods in and out. To replace or repair a loose or damaged brick, one of the bakery's advertisements claimed, a baker often had to climb into the oven while it was still hot. The family also hand packaged and delivered their products using a horse-drawn wagon, whose jingling bell signaled to neighborhood families that fresh, hot bread was coming their way.<sup>19</sup>

The Burckhards made occasional improvements to the bakery's retail space to attract customers. In August 1909, they purchased a German silver soda fountain, which they mounted on an Italian marble countertop. Soda water came out of a spigot concealed within a huge stained-glass lamp that rested on a counter. The *Aberdeen Daily American* reported on the purchase, noting, "The North Side Bakery is growing with remarkable rapidity and yesterday a very impressive evidence of the prosperity being enjoyed by this enterprising establishment was the installation of a new soda fountain, the old one having been taxed beyond its capacity." Praising Peter Burckhard as "a baker of ability and

17. Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), pp. 17–50.

18. *Aberdeen Daily American*, 25 July 1909.

19. *Aberdeen American News*, 17 June 1956.

The Burckhards used this horse-drawn wagon to deliver bread and pastries in the bakery's early years.



enterprise,” the article continued, “the new fountain is of handsome design with a large plate glass back, marble top, while the draught-on is of Mexican onyx. It was purchased of the Ward-Owsley Co. of this city, and cost \$1,000.”<sup>20</sup>

While the North Side Bakery continued to earn, as the *Aberdeen American-News* later put it, an “excellent reputation,” Peter Burckhard stepped down as manager in 1913.<sup>21</sup> Despite this change, it remained a family enterprise. In October of that year, the *Northwestern Miller* reported that “Mrs. Kate Burkhard”—meaning Katherine, not Peter’s younger sister—had assumed full ownership of the business, having likely inherited it after Paul’s death.<sup>22</sup> Frank B. Losacker, who married Peter’s sister Philippina in 1900, took over as manager. Peter’s role at the bakery during this period is unclear. He was, however, active in local athletics throughout the 1910s, participating in wrestling match-

20. *Aberdeen Daily American*, 8 Aug. 1909.

21. *Aberdeen Sunday American-News*, 3 Mar. 1921

22. “Bakery Notes,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller* 96 (22 Oct. 1913): 233.



An interior view of the bakery recorded around 1910 shows Peter Joseph Burckhard (wearing tie at right), Frank Losacker (behind the counter), and the business's famed soda foundation. The two workers are unidentified.

es in addition to pitching for and later managing the town's amateur baseball team.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1917, the *Aberdeen Daily News* announced that Peter Burckhard had taken over the bakery's management once again. Later that year, Frank and Philippina Losacker left Aberdeen to purchase the Owsley Bakery in Watertown, changing its name to the Lake Kampeska Bakery.<sup>24</sup> After reassuming control of the business, Peter promised to "make any improvements that may be necessary to give his patrons the best quality of bakery goods combined with first class service."<sup>25</sup>

23. *Aberdeen Daily American*, 21 Feb. 1912, 15 Aug. 1914.

24. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 4 Apr. 1917.

25. *Ibid.*, 15 Jan. 1917.

Peter served as the North Side Bakery's proprietor for decades, though the rest of the family, including his wife Luella, whom he married in 1910, and his mother, Katherine, who still owned the business, also made vital contributions.

By the early 1920s, the North Side Bakery's operations had become considerably more complex than in its early years. In 1921, the *Aberdeen American* described it as a "modern bakery" that ran both a day and night shift and sent out deliveries in a "Speed Wagon gasoline car."<sup>26</sup> The bakery had also purchased a Helm-Built oven with a baking capacity of five thousand loaves. The new oven exemplified how even smaller bakeries had gained access to modern technologies. As an advertisement for Helm-Built Ovens put it, "You need not to be big to be

26. *Aberdeen Sunday American-News*, 3 Mar. 1921.



Katherine Burckhard, pictured here around 1925, played an integral role in the bakery's success until her death in 1945.

modern.”<sup>27</sup> In 1929, Peter, at that time chairman of the South Dakota Bakers Unit’s northern zone, joined a group of like-minded professionals on a special visit to the Swander Bakery in Huron to see one of the most exciting innovations of the day in action: the bread slicer. The Chillicothe Baking Company in Chillicothe, Missouri, had produced the first automatically sliced loaves just a year earlier, and excitement over the recent invention spread quickly. Whether the North Side Bakery considered investing in a bread slicer is unclear, but the visit suggests Peter’s awareness of the baking trends of the day.<sup>28</sup>

The North Side Bakery used its signature styles of bread to attract customers. In the early 1920s, it frequently advertised “Honey Health” and “Butter Crisp” loaves. The former was a sweet wheat bread, advertised as highly nutritious and well-suited for children. To promote the latter, described as “the superlative production of the baker’s ovens, the best bread that can be made,” the bakery held a “popularity contest,” awarding prizes that ranged from a furniture set to an electric percolator to the customers who turned in the most Butter Crisp bread wrappers and coupons.<sup>29</sup> Again revealing the proprietors’ awareness of consumer trends, by the late 1940s, Burckhard’s emphasized its Vitality Bread, a loaf enriched with vitamins. The practice of enriching bread originated in the years surrounding World War II, when concerns about vitamin deficiency in American youth sparked efforts to mandate the adding of vitamins—specifically thiamin, touted for boosting physical strength and mental stamina—to bread. Initially skeptical consumers embraced the concept, and by the 1950s most Americans considered enriched white bread a more nutritious product than the whole wheat bread previous generations had favored. Burckhard’s Vitality Bread was likely an altered version of one of its earlier loaves, for the bakery advertised the product as a fifty-year stronghold by 1956.<sup>30</sup>

When Katherine, remembered as a “hub city pioneer,” died in 1945, Peter became the North Side Bakery’s sole owner. His children—Kathryn, Marie, Robert, and John—each contributed to the bakery during

27. *Baker’s Helper* 36 (1 Oct. 1921): 651.

28. *Evening Huronite*, 21 Aug. 1929; Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread*, pp. 55–56.

29. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 4 Dec. 1922.

30. Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread*, pp. 110–25; *Aberdeen American News*, 17 June 1956.



# 1906 — 1963



*The "Oldest" Loaf Of Bread In Town*  
— BUT THE FRESHEST

BAKED RIGHT HERE IN ABERDEEN  
FOR OVER 50 YEARS

## VITALITY

IS OUR TRADEMARK

BURCKHARD BAKERS  
Specializing In

● Pies	● Rolls	● Bread
● Birthday Cakes	● Wedding Cakes	● Special Orders

Wholesale                      Retail

"YOUR FRIENDLY HOME OWNED BAKERY"

# BURCKHARD'S NORTHSIDE BAKERY

17 North Main                      Phone BA 5-7270                      Aberdeen, S. D.

The bakery used its signature bread styles to attract customers, as seen in this advertisement for Burckhard's Vitality Bread.

his time as owner. Robert, who served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II, had become manager by the mid-1950s. The bakery hit its peak in those years, using four trucks to deliver baked goods to restaurants and groceries throughout Brown County and beyond. Bread from the North Side Bakery was sold in stores in Westport, Frederick, Houghton, Bath, Claremont, Langford, Pierpont, Groton, and as far away as Lemmon. During this period, the business employed over twenty individuals, including bakers, sales staff, and truck drivers.<sup>31</sup> The bakery's increased reach reflected wider economic

31. *Aberdeen American News*, 3 Apr. 1945, 17 June 1956, 25 Mar. 1998.



trends. Bakeries that had managed to weather the Great Depression of the 1930s experienced a renewed boom beginning in the 1940s. Postwar declines in agricultural production, meanwhile, led to population losses in rural South Dakota, forcing small-town shops to close and funneling business to cities like Aberdeen. At the same time, improved transportation networks made long-distance deliveries possible. Though it expanded during these years, the bakery remained closely associated with the community, even receiving brief mention in a 1963 *Saturday Evening Post* article about a set of quintuplets born in Aberdeen.<sup>32</sup>

When Peter Burckhard died in 1975, Robert, a member of the American Society of Bakery Engineers, assumed ownership of the business. On 25 January 1976, an advertisement in the *Aberdeen American News* marked the North Side Bakery's seventieth year by proclaiming, "We've Had a Positive Outlook for Four Generations." By that time, the North Side Bakery was the oldest wholesale-retail operation in the

32. Panschar, *Baking in America*, pp. 185–88, 213; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 329–36; Trevor Armbrister, "Our Town Is on the Map!" *Saturday Evening Post* 236 (16 Nov. 1963): 40.



Robert Burckhard posed alongside the bakery's delivery truck in 1948.



Peter and Luella Burckhard stand ready to serve customers at the bakery counter in this photograph from the 1940s.

area.<sup>33</sup> Several of Robert Burckhard and his wife Carroll's twelve children contributed to the bakery during their formative years and went on to careers in food service. Around the time of the bakery's seventieth anniversary, their son Peter—named for his grandfather—took over management of the business, though Robert maintained ownership. As Peter later explained his relationship to baking, "I've been doing it since I could see over the top of the sink."<sup>34</sup>

Robert Burckhard received the Outstanding Private Employer Award from Governor George S. Mickelson in 1993, a testament to the bakery's high standing in the community and state.<sup>35</sup> The same year, however, the family business, described by the *Aberdeen American* as

33. *Aberdeen American News*, 25 Jan. 1976, 25 Mar. 1998.

34. *Ibid.*, 2 July 1993.

35. *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1993. The Burckhard family was highly active in their community. Carroll Burckhard, for instance, belonged to several local organizations and volunteered extensively, in addition to working as a journalist and a law enforcement officer in Aberdeen. See *ibid.*, 23 May 1991.



The façade and surroundings changed, but the bakery remained at its original location for four generations. The building is pictured here in the mid-1970s.

a “local landmark,” closed its retail operation. The bakery had been shrinking for years, and three employees—down from the twenty-plus that Burckhard’s counted at mid-century—lost their jobs when its retail business ended. The closure appeared on the *American’s* front page. Peter noted that the building’s silence brought back many memories. He recalled, for instance, how “the commissioners,” a group of regular customers noted for their habit of pondering the city’s problems over coffee, used to occupy the store’s now-empty chairs. He added, “I went downstairs and turned off the ice cream freezer, and I’m not a sentimentalist, but I nearly cried.”<sup>36</sup>

For decades, the North Side Bakery had adapted to shifting consumer trends, but the gradual move of the city’s center of commerce away from North Main Street put it in a challenging position. Giving in to progress likely would have meant relocating the bakery to

36. Ibid., 2 July 1993.

an area where larger retail businesses were assembling, such as Aberdeen's Lakewood Mall, a change the Burckhard family decided not to attempt. While the bakery continued its wholesale operation and sold baked goods to restaurants and other area organizations for a few years, the development of large one-stop grocery stores and other changes in Aberdeen's retail landscape forced the nearly century-old business to shutter. The family sold the building at 117 North Main Street in 1996. Robert, who retired a few months after the bakery's storefront closed, died in 1998.<sup>37</sup>

Over a decade after closing its doors, Burckhard's Bakery returned in 2008 as part of the Palm Garden Café at 602 South Third Street in Aberdeen. Peter Burckhard noticed the business was looking for a commercial baker and used the opportunity to resurrect the family's

37. Ibid., 25 Mar. 1998. On how changing cultural and economic trends in late-twentieth-century South Dakota affected small businesses, see Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 357–60, 368–69.



Sitting amongst recently vacated tables, Peter John Burckhard reflected on the closing of the bakery's retail operation in 1993.

tradition of making bread and pastries.<sup>38</sup> Community members welcomed the bakery's return, and the *Aberdeen American* remarked that "bread and pastry lovers are saying 'how sweet it is' to have the Burckhard family bakery back on the scene in Aberdeen."<sup>39</sup> The revived bakery produced artisanal breads, cinnamon and caramel rolls, and assorted chocolates until Burckhard's retirement in 2015.

The community's lasting goodwill toward Burckhard's North Side Bakery reflects not only its distinctively fashioned baked goods, but also its management practices. Burckhard's was well known for its history of hiring individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities. The bakery also garnered praise for giving surplus bread and pastries to needy families in the community. According to Robert, the business had done so since its earliest years, when his father "gave bread to the hobos that came out of the Milwaukee (railroad)."<sup>40</sup> These traditions contributed to the bakery's success and bolstered its reputation.

Like other family-owned businesses in South Dakota, Burckhard's North Side Bakery faced numerous challenges over the course of its eighty-seven years. The enterprise envisioned by one family of German immigrants from Russia managed to navigate changing consumer trends and industry practices to become a community staple for four generations. Well regarded for its products and practices, Burckhard's bakery became a success story in the history of Aberdeen.

38. "Bread on the Rise; Palm Garden Café," *Aberdeen Magazine*, 8 July 2014, [aberneenmag.com/2014/07/palm-garden-café/](http://aberneenmag.com/2014/07/palm-garden-café/), accessed 5 Dec. 2018.

39. *Aberdeen American News*, 28 Sep. 2008.

40. *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1993.



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*On the covers:* Churches are highlighted in the 2018 annual historic preservation issue of *South Dakota History*. Pictured on the front is the steeple of Augustana Swedish Lutheran Church in Brown County. The interior of Saint Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Saint Francis appears on the back.

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